

Vermont School Boards Association	VSBA Code: A21
Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Policy Statement	First Reading: 1/24/2022 Date Adopted: 3/28/2022

Public Participation at Board Meetings

Policy:

It is the policy of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Board and its member districts (**Hartland, Mount Ascutney, and Weathersfield**) to encourage public participation at its meetings.

Background:

Public participation is very important to the successful function of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Board. The Board wants to carry out its business with the benefit of public input and expertise. It also wants to keep the public informed and up-to-date on what is happening in the community's schools. That said, public participation is not public debate or forum; it is a period during which members of the public may voice concerns to their board members and have them heard. Remediation may follow as appropriate, but not at the time of the comment(s). Further, it is a transgression of the law for individuals to preclude the board from exercising the conducting of a public meeting.

Implementation:

Reasonable rules of participation may be used to ensure that meetings are conducted in an orderly fashion and that the business at hand is completed in a timely manner. Such rules may take into consideration such things as length of each speaker's presentation and the number of times each speaker may comment.

Persons who may Address the Board:

1. Any District resident;
2. School staff members, students, and parents;
3. Individuals who have been requested by the Superintendent or the Board to present a given subject;
4. Persons who are directly affected by matters on the Board Agenda; and/or
5. Others at the discretion of the Board

Public Comment on Agenda Items:

1. The Chair will ask for comments on agenda items before action is taken by the Board.
2. When the number of people wishing to speak is large, the Board may authorize the Chair to use a speakers' list. Members of the public will be given an opportunity to sign the speakers' list, indicating which agenda item will be addressed.

Public Input on Items not on the Agenda:

1. There will be time set aside for public input on items not on the agenda at every regular, special or emergency meeting of the Board.
2. The time allotted to this item will be assigned by the Chair or the person responsible for organizing the agenda.
3. The Chair shall rule out of order any presentation to the Board which breaches the privacy or other rights of students, parents or school employees, or which does not comply with Board policy on complaints.
4. Participants are not allowed to cede remaining time to other participants.
5. If a participant's comments exceed the allotted time, they may submit their full or remaining comments to the Board in writing.
6. Written comments may not necessarily become part of a public record.
7. Every posted agenda will include instructions on submitting written comments to the board.
8. The board will not comment on public participation, except to intercede on a declaration of clearly untrue facts, or if the matter may be addressed by existing policy. If a matter requires follow-up, the board may add it as a future agenda item, or may seek clarification or answer from the administration.
9. Board chair has the responsibility and right to impose consequences.
10. Language not tolerated: obscenity, defamation, threats (none of which are protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution).
11. Board may vote to extend public comment period.
12. Board will start every public comment section by sharing purpose and expectations, and consequences of violation:
 - If infraction continues, chair may call for a brief recess or inform the speaker that their opportunity to provide comment has ended for failure to follow the policy.
 - If necessary, chair may call for removal from the podium or meeting, but not because of a disagreement with the substance of the comments.
 - Chair may close public comment portion of the meeting, may pause the meeting, or board may end meeting.

Legal References(s): 1 V.S.A. §§310 et seq. (*Public meetings*)
16 V.S.A. §554 (b) (*School board meetings*)

Cross Reference: *Board Meetings (C2)*
Board Meeting Agenda Preparation and Distribution (C1)